

CITIZENS RIGHTS VIS-À-VIS POLICE

Introduction

While planning on a strategy to get maximum impact with the different groups, several participants at the June 10, 2002 strategy workshop felt that it is important to educate the citizens on rights through legal literacy workshops as knowledge of the law can transform the lives of people. The different groups that were targeted in 2002-2003 were women's groups and the general public using the mass media like All India Radio Bilaspur and mass dissemination of fliers and literature. The other strategies that were adopted were legal literacy camps and events that were organised to highlight the International Human Rights Day and International Women's Day etc.

Legal Literacy

Literature: Between June 2002-May 2003, CHRI has developed a series of rights awareness pamphlets on citizens' rights vis-à-vis police on:

- ☞ How to register an F.I.R.?
- ☞ Rights during arrest
- ☞ Rights During Detention and interrogation
- ☞ Rights of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes
- ☞ Legal Aid Services

A booklet "Police Reforms and You" was also prepared as a part of this series on the urgent need to join the campaign on police reforms and the need to build public pressure. The literature caters to both the citizens as well as the men in uniform. The literature as well as the pamphlets were all translated to hindi and the pamphlets to Chhattisgarhi to meet the local demand.

Legal Literacy Camps: As CHRI had prepared the series on citizen's rights vis-à-vis the police, there was local demand from several participants at various workshops to start legal literacy camps with the staff of grassroot organisations and cluster leaders of self help groups so that they in their capacity can further disseminate the information to their networks.

The first of these meetings was with a group of 52 women leaders of Self Help Groups (SHGs) of Janpath Panchyat on December 3, 2002 in collaboration with MSKPP Women's Empowerment Center of Bilaspur (see list in Appendix). The participants were mostly small scale agriculturists and daily labourers of different villages viz. Pendri, Karoda, Morpaar, Chhakkarbera, Kosandi, Jayramnagar, Bakarkhuda, Koni, Khurubhatta, Sargana, Lavar, Mohtara, Moni etc. of Mastoori block. The one-day training camp was inaugurated by Mr. Madan Singh Daheriya (MLA of Mastoori). The camp started with a brief introductory note on the need for citizen's empowerment. Dr. Mukherjee, Aravinda Kosaraju of CHRI and Insp. Dubey from the Chhattisgarh Human Rights Commission were the facilitators at the workshop. The Camp commenced with a song expressing the 'unity and strength' of the women's groups.

The awareness building for these rural semi-literate women was through classroom style teaching with chalk and black board, drawing pictures, drawing linkages to local incidences and enacting skits to bring in clarity in understanding.

Impact:

At the end of the programme, the women seemed to be content to know things that they were not previously aware of. They realized that they have been addressing the kotwal (Constable) as the Daroga (Inspector). At the end of the day they felt confident that they would be in a position to get their complaints registered without fail unlike incidences in the past. Most participants repeatedly expressed the focal points of their learning and held that they will be in a position to take back the information to their family members and also to the other members of their group.

Excerpts from Aravinda's tour report:

An exercise of this nature was imperative as it was clear when the women shared their past experiences with the police. The 52 women at the camp who were mostly daily wage labourers or agricultural workers (had left their one day's work at the peak of the harvest season to attend the training) reiterated that they were to know more about their rights as they felt that the women represent the suppressed and the most vulnerable sections of the society. They are the ones who often bear the brunt of biased treatment, inaction, misuse of power and non-accountability on the part of the police. Sustained efforts of this nature will not only empower the women about their rights, but also make them agents for change.

Follow-up emerging from this exercise:

- There is a need to replicate such an exercise more often and in different jurisdictions. This will ensure that the people will be gradually aware of their rights and will feel the need to demand a democratic police.
- The women expressed greater handicap in realizing their socio-economic rights. Eg: One lady expressed that she was not allowed to enter the Block office; Another said that the authorities were not caring for their situation at the times of floods. The constitutionalism and advocacy programmes of CHRI could be a part of the legal literacy training activities in future.
- In future, active participants from legal literacy camps may be invited to conferences that are organized at the national and at the state level. This will strengthen our work and make the participants more involved in the campaign for police reforms.

After the first legal literacy camp a follow-up meeting was organised on December 3, 2002 with the same group of participants as past experiences have shown that groups from rural areas need follow-up exercises, while the groups from the urban areas require one-time training exercise owing to their level of awareness and access to information. For this reason, CHRI made attempts to address the women groups from Mastoori block for a second time. One of the highlights of this programme was the presence of the village sarpanchs and his team from the Block. They were seen furiously taking down notes on "how to file an FIR; the rights of citizens during arrest and detention; the special rights of women etc. This we accepted as our first step towards impact of the programme.

In the first week of December two other camps were organised in Avempur Thana area in Bhatgaon in Raipur district with the Berojgar Mahila Samiti (BMS) of Bhillai. There were three Self Help Groups of roughly 60 women participants, a few men of the village, the staff of the BMS and the Project Director of the Sau Sakti Project (a World Bank funded project for rural welfare for the state). The women at the workshop were semi-literate to literate. CHRI with its

staff of two and one inspector of the State Human Rights Commission imparted the training through classroom style lectures, visual media and role-plays over a period of 5 hours with a 45 minute break. The villagers were extremely receptive and requested for more interactive workshops.

The next group was a group from Bhilai, Khursipar area which is known for its demonstrations outside police stations. The women are also politically conscious. However, it was clear from the experiences shared at the literacy programme that they did not know how best the law may be used. The camp accommodated a total of 55-60 women. The two staff members of CHRI and Inspector Baig of the State Human Rights Commission facilitated the workshop. The presence of the Inspector generated a lot of interest amongst the women as they could speak to a police officer on a one-to-one basis. During the workshop, some of the participants also asked for advice on certain specific issues related to cases. The police officer of the State Human Rights Commission also discusses the processes of investigation and the reasons for its delay (often due to false information provided by the complainants), the problems faced by the police, the role that could be played by the citizens etc. These interactions are extremely fruitful and often provide the answers for the urgent need for reforms (from a bottom to top approach). On International Women's Day, CHRI staff were invited to the Bhilai Steel Plant to conduct a short programme on legal awareness with 150 participants, mostly workers and family members of the Bhilai Steel Plant.

The legal awareness camps over one year have gained popularity as very few organizations are actively involved in legal literacy programmes in Chhattisgarh. Several NGOs in Bilaspur, Durg and Rajnandgaon have asked CHRI to continue with these programmes in partnership with local organisations. The officer of the **Field Publicity Officer** in Chhattisgarh has also shown keen interest in educating their field assistants and staff on issues on citizens' rights. Another avenue that is open for CHRI to broaden work is to organise training workshops with the legal fraternity specifically women members on citizens rights vis-à-vis police and police reforms.

Rights Awareness and Use of the Media:

1. Use of Print Media: As a part of the programme on rights awareness, the CHRI has disseminated over 100,000 flyers in the districts of Raipur, Bhilai and Durg. These flyers were disseminated on 10th December, International Human Rights Day.

2. Use of Electronic Media: On International Human Rights Day, CHRI prepared small skits on citizens' rights for All India Radio, Bilaspur. The dialogues were rehearsed and auditioned by a group of 8 artists. Each spot was for a period of 90 seconds. CHRI has sponsored these programmes in Hindi and Chhattisgarhi for a period of two and half months. The programmes covered the districts of Bilaspur, Jangir and Korba.

After a quick round of interviews in Bhilai (urban) and Bilaspur (semi-rural) it was evident that the people in urban areas listened to the radio for the national news in the morning and the rural folks listen to the evening discussions on Gram Sabha. After discussions with a few local people of Bilaspur, it was decided that the programme would be broadcast on Tuesdays at 7:55 AM in Hindi and 7:22 PM on Wednesdays in Chhattisgarhi. The spots have been recorded on an ordinary audiocassette and can be used for broadcasting from different radio stations of Chhattisgarh.

Impressions:

- It is important to reach out to people through a multi-pronged approach such as radio, TV, movie theatres, newspapers etc.
- With the radio our emphasis should go beyond broadcasting spots. CHRI can produce half-an-hours programmes on different issues on police reforms between 2003-2004. This would require proper planning and preparation time.
- Another avenue to explore is to use the theatre, hoardings at railway stations etc to disseminate information on citizen's rights.

Conclusion:

CHRI has limited the work in 2002-2003 to Raipur, Bilaspur and Durg districts as the workshops on police reforms have been limited to these three areas. In the year 2003-2004, CHRI proposes to intensify the work further in the three districts in collaboration and partnerships with NGO's, the State Human Rights Commission and other civil society actors.